

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7007

INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 362

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, DM, NI, GH

SUBJ: PRESSURES ON DAHOMEAN GOVT TO COMMUTE DEATH SENTENCES

REF A. COTONOU 353 B. COTONOU A-15

SUMMARY: NIGERIAN ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF FLEW TO COTONOU YES-
TERDAY, 18 MARCH, TO URGE PRES KEREKOU TO COMMUTE DEATH SENTENCES
PRONOUNCED AGAINST SEVEN PERSONS IN NAME OF POLITICAL "TRIBUNAL"
PREVIOUS DAY. GHANAIAAN AMB (RESIDENT LOME) IS PRESENTING MESSAGE
FROM GHANAIAAN HEAD OF STATE TO KEREKOU THIS AFTERNOON. IT IS
NOW WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT IN EVERY ONE OF SEVEN CASES, ONLY
A SMALL FRACTION OF TRIBUNAL VOTED FOR DEATH PENALTY. TWO
ATTEMPTS AT PUBLIC PROTEST HAVE BEEN SQUASHED. FATE OF THE
CONDEMNED APPEARS TO DEPEND ON EFFECTIVENESS OF NIGERIAN PRESSURE
AND POSSIBILITY THAT THOSE IN OPPOSITION TO THE EXECUTIONS
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WITHIN THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, WHO APPEAR TO BE NUMEROUS AND

MAY BE A MAJORITY, WILL YET GET TOGETHER AND PREVENT THEM FROM BEING CARRIED OUT. END SUMMARY

1. NIGERIAN ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF MAJGEN DAVID EJOOR FLEW TO COTONOU YESTERDAY, 18 MARCH, FOR TALK WITH PRES KEREKOU. ACCORDING TO NIGERIAN DCM, HE URGED KEREKOU TO COMMUTE DEATH SENTENCES. LATTER WAS NON-COMMITTAL. THE GHANAIAAN AMB (RESIDENT IN LOME) IS DUE TO DELIVER A MESSAGE THIS AFTERNOON. (MARCH 19) TO KEREKOU FROM GHANAIAAN CHIEF OF STATE COL ACHEAMPONG. RESIDENT GHANAIAAN CHARGE PRESUMES IT TO BE AN APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY.

2. SINCE YESTERDAY A NUMBER OF REPORTS HAVE COME TO HAND, FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES, TO THE EFFECT THAT A VOTE WAS ACUTALLY TAKEN ON EACH ONE OF THE ACCUSED IN THE POLITICAL TRIBUNAL". ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS, WHICH ARE WIDELY ACCEPTED BY THE PUBLIC, ONLY 16 OUT OF THE APPROX 100 PARTICIPANTS VOTED FOR ASSOGBA'S EXECUTION. OF POLITICAL BUREAU (NUMBERING 13) IN THE TRIBUNAL, ONLY KEREKOU, AZONHIHO AND GRATIEN CAPO-CHICHI WERE AGAINST HIM. (THEY VOTED FOR DEATH IN ALL 7 CASES). ONLY 18 FAVORED THE DEATH SENTENCE FOR THE DAHOMEAN CATHOLIC CLERGYMAN (ABBE ALPHONSE QUENUM). THE OTHERS CONDEMNED RECEIVED MORE DEATH VOTES (4 OF THE OTHER 5 ARE ABROAD), BUT IN NO CASE A MAJORITY. ONE OR MORE MINISTERS REPORTEDLY HAVE REFUSED TO SIGN "DEATH CERTIFICATES" (WE UNDERSTAND KEREKOU AND AZONHIHO ARE TRYING TO BROWBEAT EVERYONE IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP TO SIGN SOME DOCUMENT OR OTHER, IN ORDER THAT RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE SHARED BY MANY). REPORTEDLY THERE IS STILL A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ARGUMENT AMONG MINISTERS EHETHER THE SENTENCES SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT.

3. THERE HAVE BEEN TWO UNSUCCESSFUL PUBLIC ATEMPTS TO PROTEST. THE FIRST WAS A MARCH TOWARD THE PRESIDENCY BY ABOUT FIFTY DAHOMEAN WOMEM ON MARCH 16. THAT MARCH HAD DUAL PURPOSE: TO PROTEST THE DEATH PENALTIE (NEWS OF THE SENTENCES WAS LEAKED OVER THE WEEKEND), AND ALSO TO PROTEST THE CONDITI NS OF DELNTION OF THE WIFE OF ADRIEN HOUNGBEDJI (AFTER HOUNGBEDJI'S ESCAPE FROM JAIL AND FLIGHT TO FRANCE, HIS WIFE WAS ARRESTED AND IS ALLEDGELY BEING KEPT MANACLED HAND AND FOOT). THE MARCH WAS BROKEN UP BY

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AZONHIHO HIMSELF. THE FOLLOWING DAY THE HUSBANDS OF THOSE MARCHERS WHO COULD BE IDENTIFIED WERE ARRESTED.

4. THE SECOND WAS A MASS THE EVENING OF MARCH 17 IN A CHURCH IN COTONOU ON BEHALF OF ABBE QUENUM. THE MASS WAS HALTED BY POLICE WHO REPORTEDLY USED CANES TO DISPERSE THE WORSHIPERS.

5. NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW THE EXECUTION TIMETABLE, BUT IS IS GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT IF SENTENCES ARE CARRIED OUT, IT WILL BE WITHIN NEXT THREE DAYS.

6. COMMENT: THE LONGER THE DELAY IN CARRYING OUT THE DEATH SENTENCES, THE GREATER THE CHANCE THAT MORE MODERATE COUNSELS WILL PREVAIL. QUITE POSSIBLY KEREKOU AND COMPANY ARE WAITING TO SEE JUST HOW TOUGH THE NIGERIANS WILL BE. THE LATTER DO HAVE SOME LEVERAGE, GIVEN THE PROSPECTS THEY HAVE RECENTLY OFFERED THE DAHOMEAN GOVERNMENT FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION (SUGAR REFINERY, CEMENT PLANT, SUBSTANTIAL INCOME FROM GREATER NIGERIAN USE OF THE PORT OF COTONOU). THE OTHER FACTOR THAT COULD TURN THINGS AROUND WOULD BE THE COALESCENCE FINALLY OF THOSE AMONG THE LEADERSHIP WHO ARE OPPOSED TO THE DEATH PEANTLY AND OTHER EXTREME MEASURES OF KEREKOU AND AZONHIHO. THEY ARE NUMEROUS, PROBABLY IN A GOOD MAJORITY, BUT STILL LACK LEADERSHIP AND APPEAR COWED.

7. FOR CONAKRY: WE REPEATING REF A TO YOU.
ENGLE

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